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Rakes at dawn!

Guerrilla gardener Richard Reynolds on conflict among the (flowering) borders of SE1

When I began illicitly cultivating London land in October 2004, I was unaware of any fellow guerrilla gardeners. In fact for a few weeks I mistakenly believed I'd invented the movement. I created www.GuerrillaGardening.org to blog about it and slowly people started to enlist. Some were keen to join me at the frontline in shabby areas of SE1; others wanted to share what they were doing. Esther in Camden restored neglected flowerbeds around the tower blocks of Rowstock Gardens. Sean in Kentish Town had been planting tree pits along Ryland Road with ornamentals (despite the fact that he was blind). Both of them have since gone legitimate, convincing local authorities that this was something not just to tolerate but to encourage with



around my tower block home, Perronet House in Elephant & Castle, in 2007

I wrote to Southwark Council asking for permission. They had recently hacked at my shrubs just as they were about to bloom – but that had been the first time they'd done so. After admitting some confusion, they gave me permission. They invited residents to object, but got no response. They also refunded three years of grounds maintenance charges. The (mostly council) tenants of all 80 flats, were about £100 richer. I hadn't expected that.

Unfortunately, one year on they changed their mind. New council officials were prompted to re-examining their predecessors' decision by the dribble of queries about my gardening from journalists and a couple of



Blooming marvellous London gets brighter and people involved

confused elderly residents. They found no grounds to stop me, but ingeniously dug up a clause in our leasehold and rental agreements to justify reimposing the gardening charges in full, classifying Perronet House as part of another council estate, the Gaywood Estate, and insisting we pay for the lawn mowing there – even though Gaywood is several streets away.

Saving money was never my motivation for guerrilla gardening but it's been a frustrating turn of

events. Although my neighbours and I now pay for the council contractors to do nothing in our vicinity we at least have a more beautiful garden than had permission been refused.

In vivid contrast, Lambeth Council have been encouraging – they invited me to talk about guerrilla gardening at the Lambeth Estates In Bloom awards. I have also recently been invited to participate in a Defra-funded initiative to get more people growing food and had an unexpected and positive discussion with a senior politician – although actually, it was more of an ambush than discussion. Last spring Ben, Lyla and I were planting sunflower seeds in a weedy rosebed opposite the Houses of Parliament. It was close to midnight and John Prescott MP walked by. He was wearing headphones and oblivious to our activity. But we enthusiastically approached him, confessed what we were up to and thrust a packet of seeds into his hand. He was bemused but supportive. Whether it was down to Prescott's interest or not, by the middle of the summer those seeds had become towering symbols of the opportunity lying fallow in the land around us and our perennial hope that landowners of neglected space can be persuaded to welcome and appreciate what we do.

www.guerrillagardening.org
'On Guerrilla Gardening' by Richard Reynolds is published by Bloomsbury at £14.99

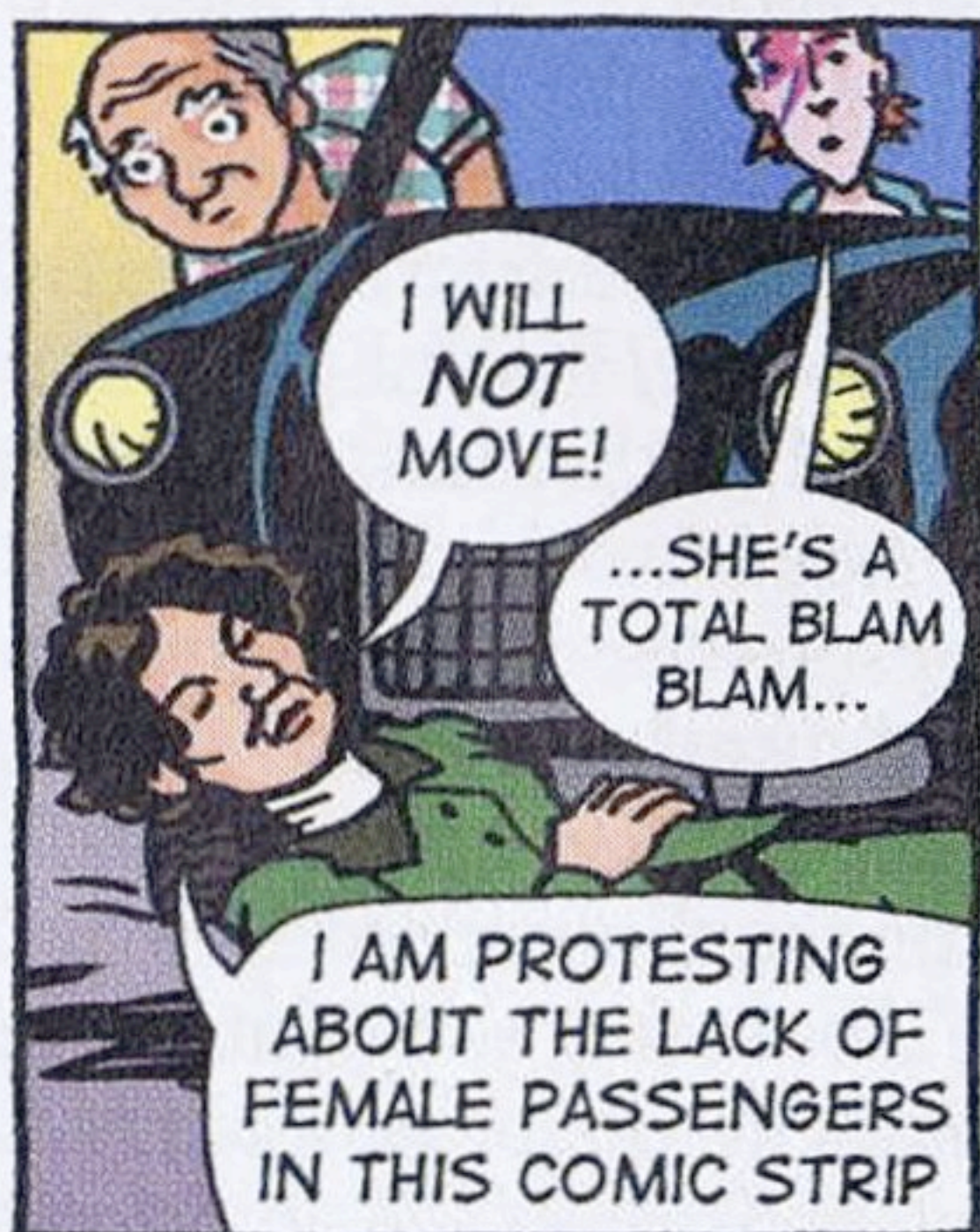
Sean had been planting tree pits with ornamentals (despite being blind)

grants and assistance. My blog and ensuing book 'On Guerrilla Gardening' attracted thousands more enlistees.

It is landlord concessions we're after. In New York, patches of guerrilla greenery have become protected community gardens; Vancouver City Council encourage the informal adoption of pavement-side nature strips. After three years of guerrilla gardening

William Blake, Taxi driver

By John Riordan



'I was watching this old film, and I suddenly realised where they got the idea for Mr Burns in "The Simpsons".' www.themanwhofellasleep.com